

**The Northern Ireland Peace Process:
A Status Report**

**Testimony
before the
House International Relations Committee's
Subcommittee on Africa, Global Human Rights
and International Operations**

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Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee, distinguished guests;

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today about progress in the Northern Ireland peace process. Quite a lot has occurred since I testified last year. When reviewing the last eighteen months, we should be encouraged by the trajectory of the peace process, although we still face some obstacles, including a basic lack of trust between the two main political parties.

The Past 18 Months

To recap briefly, in September 2004, the British and Irish governments, with strong support from President Bush, started a political process at Leeds Castle in England. These talks came very close to reaching an agreement, only to fall apart at the last moment, in December 2004. Less than two weeks after the talks collapsed, the IRA pulled off one of the largest bank robberies in UK history. It was clear that planning for the bank robbery had to have taken place during the negotiations. For Ian Paisley and his Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), this called into question Sinn Fein's sincerity – how could it negotiate peace on the one hand and allow the IRA to plan a bank heist on the other?

A few weeks after the bank robbery, there was a brutal murder of a young man named Robert McCartney outside a Belfast pub. The aftermath of this murder had all the hallmarks of an IRA operation. All of the forensic evidence, including the murder weapon, the tape in the close circuit TV camera in the pub, and fingerprints, were eliminated. Witnesses in the pub were "discouraged" from giving useful evidence to the police. The McCartney family and friends were subsequently intimidated by people alleged to be members of the IRA.

At St. Patrick's Day last year, Irish Americans gave voice to their frustration at the IRA's ongoing activities and its burden on the people of Northern Ireland and the peace

process. Sinn Fein's leader, Gerry Adams, heard that message and used it. Three weeks after St. Patrick's Day, he called on the IRA to go out of business. In July, the IRA announced that it would forswear violence and rely on "purely peaceful and democratic means." In the fall, the IRA decommissioned a substantial portion of its weapons arsenal.

In February 2006, the Independent Monitoring Commission (IMC) concluded that the IRA appears committed to ending the armed campaign, forswearing terrorism, and restructuring the IRA so that it is "no longer designed for terrorist activities." Just last week, the IMC reported that it believes the IRA has taken a strategic decision to follow a political path and does not present a terrorist threat. The commissioners' general conclusion is that this is a time of dynamic change and major progress.

All of these steps are very positive, and Gerry Adams and the entire Sinn Fein leadership deserve enormous credit for moving the republican movement in this direction. I have publicly said so.

Despite all of this progress, the journey towards peace is not yet complete. The December 2004 bank robbery has still not been solved. Robert McCartney's murderers have still not been brought to justice and his family continues to be subject to attempts at intimidation. As I mentioned, the February IMC report stated that the IRA was winding down, but it was still engaged in criminal activities and may not have decommissioned all of its weapons. Significantly, Sinn Fein refuses to support the police in Northern Ireland or to encourage its constituents to join the police service.

Ian Paisley's DUP currently refuses to enter into local government with Sinn Fein, or even to talk with them at an official level. Despite all the progress over the past year, the DUP still harbors doubts about whether Sinn Fein and the IRA are truly committed to democracy and the rule of law.

From Sinn Fein's perspective, the impasse looks different. Sinn Fein is worried that the DUP may *never* enter into a government with it. If that is the case, if the DUP will never negotiate directly with Sinn Fein, why should Gerry Adams take the difficult step to have his party endorse the police service, a step some of his followers oppose? Why should Gerry Adams give away the last high card he has to play unless he is going to have some guarantee that this step will lead to the full restoration of local government?

So as I said before, a question of trust has left us at an impasse. Hopefully, it is an impasse that will be short lived.

Focus on the Peace as well as the Political Process

As we assess progress in Northern Ireland, it is useful sometimes to disaggregate, to unbundle, the *peace* from the *process*. While the political process is currently stalled, the peace, I'm happy to report, is going well. The Northern Ireland economy is very healthy, with low unemployment. Northern Ireland is one of the fastest growing regions

in the UK. More people than ever before have jobs in Northern Ireland, with recent growth being twice the UK average. Downtown Belfast is fast becoming a modern European city. People in Northern Ireland are ignoring the politics and getting on with their lives.

One of the more encouraging signs is the growing support for integrated education. In 1985 there were only four integrated schools. That number has increased to 58 as well as 19 integrated nursery schools. A recent survey by Millward Brown Ulster showed that 81% of people in Northern Ireland believed that integrated education is important to peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland. Over time the future generations of Northern Ireland will grow up in an environment of tolerance and pluralism.

Another encouraging sign is the increasing public support for policing in unionist, nationalist, loyalist and republican communities. We all know that a fundamental building block for any normal society is the rule of law. Support for the rule of law by all parties is the foundation upon which further economic success and political stability can be built.

Relative to Dublin, New York, or even Washington, DC, Northern Ireland enjoys a relatively low crime rate. In fact, last year's figures were a six-year low for the country. According to the Chief Constable, Hugh Orde, overall crime in Northern Ireland in the last two years is down 17 percent.

But victims do not want to hear about another city's crime rate, and every community in Northern Ireland deserves to have the protection that effective policing provides. No one deserves to be a second-class citizen, living a ghetto-ized existence, because political leaders place their own agenda ahead of the well-being of their constituents.

Policing in Northern Ireland has improved tremendously in recent years, and may be the outstanding success story of the peace process. Political parties, notably the SDLP, and many individuals have taken courageous steps to launch the new beginning to policing. The Patten Commission reforms, together with effective leadership from the Policing Board, the Police Ombudsman, and the Chief Constable, have introduced genuine community-based policing to Northern Ireland.

An independent Ombudsman, Nuala O'Loan, has a mandate to investigate any allegations of police misbehavior, and she does so. And let's not forget that last September the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) took over 150 live rounds from loyalist paramilitaries while protecting republicans and nationalists in west and north Belfast.

In his last report in December 2005, Oversight Commissioner for Policing Reform Al Hutchinson noted that 114 of the 175 recommendations made by the Independent Commission on Policing Reform for Northern Ireland (Patten Commission) have been completed, and that this served "as a worthy reminder that a great deal has been accomplished by the policing institutions over the past four years."

Hutchinson goes on to say that he expects most of the remaining recommendations “to be fully implemented by May of 2007” and notes the “the clear track record of the Police Service and Policing Board meeting their obligations. Hopefully this success will be matched by increasing trust, faith and participation in the existing policing structures, as the wider community increasingly recognizes the profound nature and degree to which policing has changed.”

Much of the remaining recommendations focus on training, information technology, and property management – including the creation of a state of the art training academy in 2009 to replace the antiquated training college currently used by the PSNI.

Chris Patten himself stated in November 2003 that he believes “the Patten Report is being implemented in full.” The Oversight Commissioner’s office has confirmed this in a series of reports. The previous Oversight Commissioner, Tom Constantine, noted that the institutions involved in the policing of Northern Ireland “continue to make excellent progress in implementing a program of change in policing that may be the most sweeping and complex ever attempted in a modern society.”

Conclusion

The Bush Administration will continue to advance both the peace and the political process. We have been outspoken in our support for integrated education. We have had discussions about how Northern Ireland can attract greater foreign direct investment to sustain a healthy economy. We have strongly supported the “new beginning” to policing and urged all political parties to endorse the PSNI. We talk continuously to the two governments and all the political parties, serving as a confidential advisor and traditional “honest broker.”

So as we work to move the political process forward, we are also mindful of the significant progress that has already taken place in Northern Ireland.

As we recognize this progress, we are mindful that now is not the time to be complacent. The Bush Administration will continue working hard to assist the British and Irish governments, and all the people in Northern Ireland, to realize the full promise of the Good Friday Agreement.

Thank you.